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CRITICAL NOTICES.

SAYCE'S EARLY HISTORY OF THE HEBREWS.

The Early History of the Hebrews, by the Rev. A. H. SAYCE. (London, Rivingtons, 1897.)

IN the first chapter of this work we are given an account of the life of the Hebrew patriarchs. Then follows a chapter on the composition of the Pentateuch, after which come four chapters describing the Exodus out of Egypt, the Conquest of Canaan, the Ages of the Judges, and the establishment of the monarchy. This history of ancient Israel ends with Solomon's death.

According to the Preface, the author's work differs from the other numerous existing histories of Israel, in that it is "the first attempt to write one from a purely archaeological point of view." The real meaning of this assertion it would be difficult to give, but what Prof. Sayce intends it to mean is clear. He implies that other historical works take the Biblical accounts as their starting-point, arranged and criticized in accordance with the views of the different scholars, while he, on the other hand, takes as his starting-point the information obtained from the Egyptian and Babylonian-Assyrian documents. This is the firm foundation on which he builds. In agreement with this is the illogical order of the first two chapters. The proper order would have been to begin with the criticism of the sources from which our knowledge of the time of the patriarchs and the wanderings through the wilderness is drawn, that is of the Pentateuch, and only after this to give the history of the patriarchs and of the period with which the Pentateuch deals. Sayce's reversal of this order by inserting his critical analysis between the patriarchs and the Exodus, could only be justified if the material for chap. I were not taken from the Pentateuch, and if its contents were not used to criticize the matter and theorize on the composition of the Pentateuch. But any one who is here on unknown ground, and innocently seeks an "archaeological" history of the patriarchs in chap. I will be bitterly disappointed. Even if the quotations which

Sayce makes from Egyptian and Babylonian-Assyrian fragments proved all that he supposes them to do, still not even the skeleton of a history of the patriarchs could possibly be made out of them. Not one of these fragments contains a single name, or a single fact, which contributes anything towards such a history. They give at most an illustration or an amendment of the Biblical narratives. The history of the patriarchs given by Sayce in chap. I is taken from Genesis, of which he pronounces, quite arbitrarily, the one narrative to be more historical, the other less. Archaeology only serves to complete the narratives. This is done in the following manner:—Genesis xiv (for this is really the only chapter the trustworthiness of which Sayce, as we know from his earlier books, essays to prove by non-biblical documents) contains in the narrative of the expedition of the four kings from the east, some names, which it is true do not occur in any Babylonian-Assyrian account, but a few of which bear some resemblance to names found there. On this ground Amraphel is identified with King Khammu-rabi. Our knowledge of this king is considerable, so that all we know about him serves to complete the biblical narrative, and especially serves as confirmation of its trustworthiness. Nor again does the name Melchisedek occur in the Tell-Amarna fragments, nor his "Almighty God," but what is said in these important documents about Jerusalem serves to complete Gen. xiv. If an argument concludes lamely, the expression "at all events" or "in any case," is brought in to cover up defects.

As an example of this method of argument, take p. 81. Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac on the mountain where lay the future Jerusalem. But, asks Sayce, how was this possible? The narrative in Genesis implies that the place was uninhabited, and yet Melchisedek ruled and lived there. "The difficulty seems overwhelming." But it is not definitely stated that the place was uninhabited; before the time of Solomon the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite must have been an open space. It is true that in the Book of Samuel, "when we are told how the threshing-floor of the Jebusite came to be chosen as the site of the Temple" (this is not stated in the Books of Samuel), "no allusion is made to Abraham's sacrifice;" but Orientals write differently from ourselves. "Mount Moriah then may well have been the scene of that temptation of Abraham. At all events the belief that it was so can be traced back to an early date among the Jews." At all events! Note that this belief is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament.

In the chapter on the composition of the Pentateuch, Sayce tells us that Genesis is made of different writings, put together by no other

hand than that of Moses. A return to the days of Astruc! And how then are the numerous anachronisms and errors explained, which are fully admitted by Sayce? Well, changes and interpolations have naturally been made in the work of Moses. It was Ezra who really brought it into the form in which we now possess it. But what the critical school teaches about dates of the documents that form the Pentateuch, of the Elohist and the Jahwist and others, is absolutely untrue. For on what are all these arguments based? "On nothing else than on the assumption that in the days of Moses the art of writing was unknown. But the discovery of the Tell-Amarna tablets has now proved the contrary, and with this the house of cards of the new Pentateuchal criticism completely falls to the ground. Their background is gone." Is it possible for any one to set to work with greater levity than Sayce? Does he *really* not know better than this on what arguments the more recent Pentateuch criticism is based? What critic of any mark proceeds from the assumption that in Moses' time men could not write or put together a document? One critic may attach more weight to arguments drawn from language and style than another, but all attach very great weight to the "historical" argument that the Israelites of the Monarchy were evidently not acquainted with that Law which in the Pentateuch is said to have been given by Moses. This is the background of the new criticism, ever since it was observed (which Sayce too does not deny) that the narratives of the Pentateuch are full of anachronisms. Even in the famous story of Gen. xiv, the trustworthiness of which is said to be supported by so many accounts from other sources, the town Dan is mentioned. Is this Mosaic? "Henceforth," writes Sayce, "the historian who pursues a scientific method may safely disregard the whole fabric of Hexateuchal criticism." Safely? What lines then must we follow in order to be safe from error? Critical treatment of the narratives is necessary. Sayce admits that repeatedly. Who is to guide us? Phantasy, it seems, must be our guide, especially the phantasy of Prof. Sayce. It merely states without arguments (when does phantasy argue?) one account to be historical, another unhistorical. If examples are wanted, let the reader turn to the following chapters of his book. Instances may be taken at random. It would naturally be supposed that Moses, to whose editing we are said to owe the narratives about the patriarchs, would have left us detailed accounts of his own life and experiences. But this is not the case. Of the marching out of Egypt Sayce gives us an account with a rationalistic colouring; the writers were so ill-informed that they did not know what the Sea of Suph was; the divine name "Jahwe" was first revealed to Moses; the story of his circumcision is merely folklore;

Pharaoh's eldest son died of the plague. The Israelites "themselves connected the flight with the institution of the feast of the Passover. But the feast of the Passover seems to have been a combination of two older festivals." That modern critics have maintained the tabernacle to be "the subject of an elaborate fiction" is most strongly to be deprecated; but "how far the description of the tabernacle is exact, how far it has not been coloured by the conceptions of a later age is, of course, a question that may be asked." So it continues. The narrative of the spies and the forty years' wanderings is watered down; "it is probable that most of the fighting men had been lost in the earlier expedition," i.e. in the unsuccessful attempt to enter Canaan; the ordinance about the Levitical towns is entirely misunderstood; nothing is left of the miracles of the crossing of the Jordan and the taking of Jericho; Joshua was not the conqueror of Canaan. "We are not bound to believe that the division of the land was made with the mathematical precision which had become possible in the days of the compiler of the Book of Joshua, but to deny that it was made at all is merely an abuse of criticism."

Of the purely archaeological point of view from which the history of the Judges and the first Kings is treated, we naturally do not discover much; for of these we possess none but the biblical accounts. Sayce makes a hopeless attempt to bring the war of Cushan-rishataim into connexion with a campaign of Rameses III. But the "history" which Sayce gives beyond this, does not perceptibly differ from that of others, though he strikes a blow at recent criticism from time to time. Thus in the history of Jerubbaal two "different and mutually inconsistent narratives" are discovered. "It cannot be denied that the history of the war against the Midianites in its present form is confused. That the compiler of the book of Judges should have made use of more than one narrative, if such existed, is indeed only natural, and what a conscientious historian would be bound to do. . . . But to distinguish minutely the narratives one from the other, much more to analyze them into still smaller fragments, is the work of Sisyphus." "The historian must leave all such literary trifling to the collectors of lists of words, and content himself with comparing and analyzing the facts recorded in the story."

This is indeed the simplest way; it only requires very few hours to acquire by this method an imaginative picture of less or greater probability. But it is a method of gross disrespect towards the books of the Bible which are thus maltreated; in the highest degree unjust towards those scholars who, by indefatigable analysis in

accordance with scientific principles, seek for historical truth; and dishonest towards the unsuspecting reader in whose eyes dust is thrown by empty protestations of affection for the books of the Bible and their writers.

H. OORT.

SIEGFRIED ON ECCLESIASTES AND CANTICLES.

Handkommentar zum Alten Testament. Prediger und Hoheslied übersetzt und erklärt, von C. SIEGFRIED. (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.)

THE announcement of a commentary on Ecclesiastes by Dr. Siegfried of Jena could scarcely fail to excite expectation. The learned professor was believed to have given long ago some special attention to the book; and, besides, his researches in Jewish Hellenism and Philo, his *Grammatik der neuhebräischen Sprache*, and the *Hebräisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, executed in co-operation with Stade, might be regarded as indicating special qualifications for the task he has now undertaken. If the present work does not seem altogether worthy of its distinguished author, we may at once admit that it sets forth positions which appear to us at once notable and sound, even if they are not entirely new.

There is, first, the assertion that the book exhibits the old Hebrew language in its last stage of development, and making a marked approach to the idiom of the Mishnah; secondly, that the book was written in the Greek and not in the Persian period; thirdly, that it shows traces of Greek thought; and, lastly, that *Koheleth* is equivalent primarily to קהל חכמים, "an assembly of sages."

With regard to the third position, our author asserts that, whatever may be thought as to the evidential force of alleged parallels in Greek philosophical literature, the fact of Greek influence is nevertheless to be regarded as no longer in dispute. The question now to be decided is, whether this influence was greater or less¹. Then—as to

¹ "Es dreht sich nur um ein mehr oder weniger." On the causes of the change which has occurred with regard to this question in recent years it is not necessary for me now to dilate. When Dr. Siegfried says (p. 20, note) that the influence of Greek philosophy was first suggested by Van der Palm, he is in error. Van der Palm maintained the Solomonic authorship against what had been said by Grotius. And what is said in the same note concerning Zirkel and Graetz may also mislead.